



Each year, we recognize World TB Day on March 24. This annual event commemorates the date in 1882 when Dr. Robert Koch announced his discovery of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, the bacillus that causes tuberculosis (TB).

World-wide 1.5 million people died from TB in 2020 and 10 million people became ill with TB disease, according to the World Health Organization. Approximately 2 billion people in the world have TB infection (TBI) also known as latent TB infection or LTBI.

Texas continues to be impacted by TB

A total of 882 cases were reported in Texas in 2020 compared to 1,154 in 2019. This decrease may be due to a drop in the number of people newly diagnosed with TB and reported because of the Covid-19 pandemic. **Texas rates are still higher than the U.S national average.** *In 2020, Texas remains one the top four states across the country with the highest rates of TB.* Williamson County treated 16 active TB cases in 2020 and 12 active cases in 2021, with a **total of 73 active cases** over the last 7 years. Among those cases were 4 multi-drug resistant patients. Travis County treated 32 active TB cases in 2020 and 44 active cases in 2021, with a **total of 309 active cases** over the last 7 years. Both counties have treated thousands of people for LTBI. In Travis County one person died in 2020 and 2 in 2021 from TB prior to getting diagnosed and treated.

Our current efforts to find and treat LTBI and TB disease are **not enough**. Misdiagnosis and delayed treatment of TB still exists, and health care professionals often do not “think TB.” And when they do, they may only order AFB smears instead of both smears and cultures on all samples (sputum, tissue biopsies, pleural fluid, etc).

Up to 13 million people in the US have latent TB infection

Approximately 80% of TB cases in the U.S. are attributed to reactivation of longstanding, untreated LTBI. **Testing for and treating LTBI in high-risk populations is the most effective way to prevent TB disease.**

TB and COVID-19 share some clinical features, such as cough and fatigue, and it is easy to forget TB as a differential in the face of COVID-19. Therefore, it is more important than ever that physicians remember to screen/test, diagnose, and treat for TB disease and Latent TB infection (LTBI). Patients with TB are at increased risk for severe illness or dying from COVID-19

[Tuberculosis & COVID-19: info](#)

Our Ask

Austin Public Health (APH) and Williamson County and Cities Health District (WCCHD) TB Management Programs are calling on all physicians in the counties to partner with us in ending TB. Global, national and local efforts are expanding opportunities for private healthcare providers to play a critical role in TB control and prevention by performing targeted testing and treatment of persons at greatest risk for TB in recognition that many patients first present to their PCPs for symptom evaluation. **The most effective way to further reduce the number of new TB cases in the US is by eliminating the reservoir for active TB disease by identifying and treating LTBI.**

Here's How You Can Help

- **Screen** your asymptomatic patients who are high-risk for LTBI (such as born in a country with high incidence rate, immunosuppressed, or healthcare workers);
- Report all diagnosed LTBI cases to APH or WCCHD TB Management Programs [How to report TB](#) [Austin Public Health Reporting](#) [WCCHD reporting form](#)
- Encourage all patients with LTBI to be treated; APH and WCCHD offer **free** evaluation and treatment
- The Health Departments can provide technical assistance on treatment regimens and monitoring for side effects, provide lectures and do trainings if you would like to learn how to “think TB” or treat LTBI yourself
- **Think TB** when you see patients with signs and symptoms that could be consistent with active disease – there's more TB disease in our community than you realize!
- If you work for a healthcare organization, support efforts to encourage employees with LTBI to be treated;
- Feel free to call the APH or WCCHD TB Programs with any referrals, questions or concerns.

See CDC's [Screening for LTBI](#) for additional guidance on screening. If you are interested in learning more about the most recent clinical recommendations for LTBI, please download the [LTBI Clinical Recommendations](#).

Please call our TB Management Programs at APH: 512-972-5460 and WCCHD: 512-248-7651 or go to the [CDC's TB website](#) for additional information regarding LTBI and TB disease.

Thank you in advance for your partnership in testing and treating LTBI and TB disease. Together we can partner for a TB-Free Texas.

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